



Narrative for Francis McClure Intermediate School McKeesport Area School District

Francis McClure Intermediate School is one of three elementary schools located in the McKeesport Area School District. McKeesport Area School District receives students from five communities: Dravosburg, White Oak, McKeesport, South Versailles and Versailles, and it is located in the Mon Valley region right outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The district is proud of its accomplishments, and has always strived to provide a quality education for all students. The median household income in our district is \$34,000. The median value of a home is \$56,000 and the poverty rate is so high that all the students in the district are eligible to receive free breakfast and lunch.

During the 2012-2013 school year Francis McClure Intermediate School was one of many schools within the McKeesport Area School District that underwent a major renovation. The conditions of the school buildings were not good, so the district closed four schools and renovated and/or built two new facilities to educate the students that had attended the now closed schools. At that time Francis McClure Intermediate's student population consisted of all 5th and 6th grade students within the district and a third of all grade 4 students. During that school year renovations occurred in various sections of the building which resulted in having to relocate students within the building several times so that renovations could continue. Student safety had to be the greatest priority during the 2012-2013 school year, which resulted in instruction becoming the second priority.

Due to the renovations, the movement of students and many other factors that made the 2012-2013 school year difficult and chaotic, our school was designated a Focus School for the upcoming 2013-2014 school year. Francis McClure Intermediate School's building level academic score for the 2012-2013 school year was 51.1 according to the PA School Performance Profile. The documents revealed that only 48% of our students scored Proficient or Advanced on the PSSA Math, and only 38% scored Proficient or Advanced in Reading. These results showed that we needed to drastically change what we were teaching and how we were teaching.

The renovations were completed for the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year and as a result the student grade configurations changed. Francis McClure Intermediate School's student population now consisted of half of the McKeesport Area School Districts' grades 3, 4, and 5. The students came from a variety of backgrounds, which included a mix of urban and suburban students. We also serve all of the students who reside in the two McKeesport Public Housing plans located within the school district.

The information obtained from the PA School Performance Profile created a sense of urgency that required immediate attention. A School Improvement Committee consisting of teachers, support staff, parents, administrators and community stakeholders was developed to draft a plan for improvement. The plan provided our school with a road map that could be immediately implemented. We used the data from several assessments (PLATO, Grade, Dibels and DAZE) to guide all decisions that were connected to instruction. A daily 40-minute Reading enrichment/intervention period was put into place to group students for targeted skill instruction based on assessment and progress monitoring data. The instruction that students receive is targeted to address their academic deficits. For example, if the data exposes that a student has a

comprehension issue, during the enrichment period the teacher will work with the students on a specific strategy. The teacher explains to students why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy. The teacher models, or demonstrates, how to apply the strategy, usually by "thinking aloud" while reading the text that the students are using. The teacher guides and assists students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy. The teacher helps students practice the strategy until they can apply it independently. A Math enrichment period was also implemented three days out of a six-day rotation for all students. The Math enrichment operated in the same manner as the Reading enrichment period.

Francis McClure Intermediate School's School Improvement Committee worked collectively with the school district's administration and the teachers' association to change the building schedule to add a thirty-minute time block in the morning to provide the teachers time to meet daily. Regular teacher meetings were held for teachers to review Reading and Math progress, monitor formative assessment data to reevaluate student needs, and make adjustments to teaching. Student learning data was also shared more frequently with teachers, students, and student's family members to set goals for continued progress.

With the focus placed solely on instruction, 2013-2014 Francis McClure Intermediate's School Performance Profile score was released and drastic improvement was shown. The building level academic score rose to 72.6, with 62% of our students scoring Proficient or Advanced on the PSSA Math and 50% of our students scoring Proficient or Advanced in Reading. Indicators of growth were 100% for Math and 88% for Reading. Although the scores rose, more work still needed to be done.

During the 2014-2015 school year, teacher professional development continued to be a major focus and a one-year plan was developed. To make sure that the plan was adhered to, monthly planning calendars were provided to teachers indicating dates for all Reading and Math meetings along with the dates for building wide SAS (Standards Aligned System) training. This calendar was added as an addition to the plans written during the prior school year. The focus of all professional development sessions was to assist the teachers in better understanding what should be taught, when it should be taught and how to teach it. For our SAS trainings that year, a book was purchased, "The Common Core Lesson Book, K-5: Working with Increasingly Complex Literature, Informational Text, and Foundational Reading Skills Book" written by Gretchen Owocki. This book provided staff with a consistent understanding and an implementation mechanism of the PA Core Standards for English Language Arts. One or two monthly planning meetings were held for the Reading Coordinator, Building Principal, and Title I Reading Specialist to develop the agenda for future staff meeting. These individuals would then facilitate meetings for all staff to focus on one ELA Standard for reading literature and reading informational text. The standard was unpacked and teachers were provided resources found on pdesas.org, including lesson ideas, posters, read aloud book titles, questions, etc. These meetings were instrumental for increasing collaboration amongst teachers and ensuring more consistent instructional approaches for meeting PA Core Standards.

Although the state did not release an SPP score for the 2014-2015 school year, our students continued to make growth according to our individual PSSA student reports and our overall building PVAAS data in 4th grade. In Math, the 2015 PVAAS data stated that there was significant evidence that the students exceeded the standard for PA Academic Growth. Similarly, in 4th grade Reading, the PVAAS data stated that there was evidence that the students met the standard for PA Academic Growth. In 5th grade Math, the 2015 PVAAS data stated that there was evidence that the students met the standard for PA Academic Growth.

Using the morning meeting format for professional development continues to be a positive structured way to gather the teachers to inform them about teaching strategies and

anchors. In addition to reviewing the ELA anchors, writing has been added. Building wide writing strategies and common writing assessments have informed us about areas of concern so that instruction can be targeted to increase writing proficiency for all students.

The staff has embraced the direction that our plan of improvement has taken our school. Parent meetings are often held to teach the parents about the strategies that the teachers are using in school. The students' academic improvement has been mostly due to our school staff remaining focused on our plan of improvement and all decisions that are made are based on data. The financial support that we have received to fund small class sizes via Title IIA, along with money from the Keystones to Opportunity Grant helped to improve literacy outcomes for all students. Title I funding, special education funding as well as local revenue provided additional staff to meet the needs of our struggling learners. Those funds also provided additional learning materials to address the gaps in instruction that were exposed via our ongoing student assessments. All of the items listed above are vital for us to continue to implement our building school improvement plan. Although all of our students have not reached the 100% benchmark we will continue to use the data as our guide and make revisions to our original plan to address the academic deficits of all our students.

The threat of losing funding that provides personnel, programming and supplies to meet our student' needs looms daily. Community members and parents recognize that we are improving our building scores, but want us to increase them faster. We are losing our students because some of our parents want smaller class size and more focused attention on their child. Without financial support it would be impossible to continue with the plan that we put in place during the 2012-2013 school year. We need a continued commitment so that our students can receive what they deserve so that they can grow up with the tools that they need to be productive citizens. All children have the right to be literate and we are obligated to ensure that we do everything in our power to ensure that right. The recommendations that can be made to any district that is striving to make improvement is find the direction that the data takes you, put a committee together to write a plan, revisit it often, revise it when the data dictates to do so and stick to it not matter what.

Submitted by
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